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Synopses of Important Articles.

The Seat and Sources of Authority in Religion.* This problem which so exercises the mind of today is simply a new form of the old question concerning the relations of Reason to Faith. It has been created in its present form by the rise and growth of what is termed the higher criticism as applied to the Sacred Scriptures. This higher criticism is but a name for scientific scholarship scientifically used. Grant such scholarship legitimate, and the legitimacy of its use to all fit subjects must also be granted. To allow that many of its conclusions are arbitrary, provisional, or problematical, is simply to say that it is a human science, created by men, worked by men, yet growing ever more perfect with their mastery of their material. Now, the Scriptures either are or are not fit subjects for scholarship. If they are not, then all sacred scholarship has been and is a mistake, and they are a body of literature possessed of the inglorious distinction of being incapable of being understood. If they are, then the more scientific the scholarship the greater its use in the field of Scripture; the more it is reverently exercised on a literature that can claim to be the pre-eminent sacred literature of the world, the more will that literature be honored. With the many new elements entering into sacred scholarship, it was impossible that traditional views and traditional causes should remain unaffected. If ever anything was inevitable through the progress of science, it was the birth of the higher criticism; and once it existed, it was no less a necessity that it should have a mind and reach conclusions of its own. Where scholarship has the right to enter, it has the right to stay; and it cannot stay in idleness. What it does and decides may be wrong, but the wrong must be proved by other and better scholarship. Is the Protestant doctrine of the authority of the Scriptures in matters of faith and conduct negated by a critical handling of them? Must we maintain the traditional view of the Bible over against the critical, in order that it may remain to us the authoritative Word of God? Dr. Martineau and certain conservative though not therefore orthodox, theologians, answer affirmatively. But this is the kind of defense that loses the citadel by concentrating the forces on the weakest, least defensible, and most superfluous outwork. The existence of Scripture as the authority in religion is staked on questions that, whatever may be said and done, critical scholarship alone can decide, and will decide, in its own way, and so decide as to be ultimately believed. Neither to Dr. Martineau nor to the traditional conservative can we concede this, that criticism invalidates the Bible as a religious authority. Further, the theory is inconsistent with the inspiration of the books and the men who made the books. Their authority is made dependent on the traditional canon, and on their being what it represents them as being. But a law does not become authoritative by being codified; it is codified because it is authoritative. So a book does not become inspired by being authenticated or canonized. It is to their essential character and contents that the books owe their authority. The tradition or the polemic

* By the Rev. A. M. Fairbairn, D. D. L. L. D., in *Christian Union*, Oct. 10 & 17, 1891.

that obscures these hides the authority; the criticism that makes them most manifest reveals it. Criticism has, by bringing the sacred books into relation with sacred history, done something to restore them to their real and living significance. By binding the book and the people together, and then connecting both with the Providential order of the world, criticism has given us back the idea of the God who lives in history through his people, and a people who live through His Word. And so the Word of God is a large term; it does not denote a closed, but a living history; not something that is dead, a letter that can be printed in black on white, a book which compositors have set up and binders have bound and educated people can read. It is living; it has no being without the Spirit of God; were that spirit to be withdrawn, the Scriptures would cease to exist; where they were, a literature would remain, but not the word of the living God.

These ideas of Dr. Fairbairn's, while perhaps not new, are yet important. They present one view, and that an increasingly acceptable one, of this fundamental theological problem upon which thought is at present engaged.

St. John in Modern Christian Thought.*—During the Middle Ages, Paul was little known and less understood. The Reformation may be said to have rediscovered him, and since that time St. Paul has dominated the thought and life of the Christian Church. But the movement now is toward St. John; his writings are coming to a fuller recognition than they have ever yet received. His characteristic thoughts have never yet penetrated theology and church life as have St. Paul's, but his day is at hand—our age is discovering him. Much preparatory work is necessary before St. John's teaching can be understood as a whole, and in relation to the rest of Scripture. That this preparatory work is being done is evinced by the large number of the very finest and most scholarly commentaries which are now appearing, treating of the Johannine writings. If St. John can be made as much the common property of the church as is St. Paul, the result can be only good. And there is no reason to think that the effect of the present direction of thought will be to displace St. Paul. This could only be the case if the teaching of the two Apostles were mutually antagonistic, but it is not so. Their teaching is mutually complementary. The difference in regard to the truth common to both is simply one of expression and proportion.

Among the New Testament problems which now engage the attention of Christian scholars and Bible students, that concerning the Johannine writings is obviously paramount. St. John's day, as Prof. Banks says, has come. The questions which this problem involve are many and delicate; they concern, first, the authorship, but that is only the grosser aspect; secondly, the conditions to which the material of the writings was subject in its historical transmission by John. Here is the vital question. How did John's personality, and his sixty years of life between the receiving and the recording of Jesus' teaching, affect that teaching? To this we may well give earnest study and thought.

Wendt's *Der Inhalt der Lehre Jesu*.† This volume by Prof. H. H. Wendt on the *Contents of the Teaching of Jesus* was preceded, five years since, by a preliminary volume in which he essayed to separate the original and authentic portions of the Gospel narrative, which would furnish the basis for the present work, from such accretions and manipulations as he conceived

* By Rev. Prof. J. S. Banks, in the *Expository Times*, Nov. 1891.

† Reviewed by Prof. W. P. Dickinson, D. D., in *Critical Review*, Oct. 1891.